

Sophie Lanctôt, Mallarmé, Molinari: CROSSWORDS

June 6 – August 25, 2024

Meeting Points

Between the visible and readable, Sophie Lanctôt proposes paintings in which textual fragments are scattered alongside figurative motifs. In recent years, words have become an integral part of her practice, particularly in her work with family letter archives (*Variations Marguerite*) and her large-scale citational paintings (Rilke, Kafka, Duras, Mallarmé), which she began in 2019. The current exhibition takes this approach a step further.

Sophie Lanctôt's exploration focuses entirely on the work of the poet Stéphane Mallarmé, with a particular interest for his poem *Un coup de Dés jamais n'abolira le Hasard* (1897). An emblematic work of modernity, this spatial and typographical poem, spread over 24 pages, is pictorially echoed in 5 oil paintings, including a double painting that is the exhibition's centerpiece. Their strong presence enters into dialogue with the other displayed paintings, whose citational link is tied to prose works. The exhibition prompts a prismatic experience.

Paradoxically, the words on the painting create a space of silence. When the legible steps in, something other than the visible can arise between us and the painting: a question, an associative drift, the disjointed murmur of memory—all of which slow down our gaze. Words elicit inner echoes that extend the creative gesture.

In most of the works on display, the textual fragment coexists with a figurative motif. A chandelier, a flower, a cloud or a hand float in isolation against a vacant background. A dense aura envelops and dissolves the motif, an aura from which the "phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be"¹

can arise. Yet it is this figuration element that dictates the choice of words, and not the other way around. For the painter, what come first are motifs, drawn from objects of her personal memory, built up by the superimposition of layers of experience, works and perceptions. The memorial object is raised to the painting's surface by words that, in a way, authorize it to be painted, because textuality releases it from its individual history to place it in a broader dimension.

Sophie Lanctôt's paintings are caught in a struggle between the will to represent and the desire to erase. Each figurative motif appears to be torn from the void, wandering between survival and abandonment. This is borne out by the white that haunts her paintings—in their concealment, in the materiality of the backgrounds and the interstitial spaces—a white that is certainly the most obvious link between her and Mallarmé. For the first time, black makes a forceful appearance in Sophie Lanctôt's paintings, after being used only in her drawings and ink-wash works. She borrows Mallarmé's "goutte de néant" (drop of nothingness)² to forge her own *œuvre au noir*.

Maintaining representation and suspending temporality are strategies of resistance that Sophie Lanctôt proposes through her pictorial practice: it's about continuing to express—nonetheless.

— Monic Robillard

Finally, Mallarmé has come...³

Straightaway upon entering the exhibition, the dice are cast: we are in the presence of Sophie Lanctôt's painting, which meets up with Molinari's work via Mallarmé's poetry. This encounter is not the first for the painter: Molinari sat on her Master's jury at Concordia University, and later invited her to exhibit with him in Sherbrooke. Without realizing it at the time, both shared a similar love of words. Mallarmé's writing did the rest...